

AMENDMENT OF SOLICITATION/MODIFICATION OF CONTRACT			1. CONTRACT ID CODE	PAGE OF PAGES
				1 80
2. AMENDMENT/MODIFICATION NUMBER 91990022C0015P00003	3. EFFECTIVE DATE DEC 04, 2022	4. REQUISITION/PURCHASE REQUISITION NUMBER	5. PROJECT NUMBER (<i>If applicable</i>)	
6. ISSUED BY US Dept of ED-550 12th Street SW - Room 7169 Washington DC 20065	CODE CAMPCP	7. ADMINISTERED BY (<i>If other than Item 6</i>) See Block 6	CODE	
8. NAME AND ADDRESS OF CONTRACTOR (<i>Number, street, county, State and ZIP Code</i>) MATHEMATICA INC. 600 ALEXANDER PARK SUITE 100 PRINCETON NJ 08540			(X)	9A. AMENDMENT OF SOLICITATION NUMBER
				9B. DATED (<i>SEE ITEM 11</i>)
			X	10A. MODIFICATION OF CONTRACT/ORDER NUMBER 91990022C0015
			X	10B. DATED (<i>SEE ITEM 13</i>)
CODE 00000011	FACILITY CODE	MAR 02, 2022		

11. THIS ITEM ONLY APPLIES TO AMENDMENTS OF SOLICITATIONS

The above numbered solicitation is amended as set forth in Item 14. The hour and date specified for receipt of Offers is extended. is not extended.
 Offers must acknowledge receipt of this amendment prior to the hour and date specified in the solicitation or as amended, by one of the following methods:
 (a) By completing items 8 and 15, and returning _____ copies of the amendment; (b) By acknowledging receipt of this amendment on each copy of the offer submitted; or (c) By separate letter or electronic communication which includes a reference to the solicitation and amendment numbers. FAILURE OF YOUR ACKNOWLEDGMENT TO BE RECEIVED AT THE PLACE DESIGNATED FOR THE RECEIPT OF OFFERS PRIOR TO THE HOUR AND DATE SPECIFIED MAY RESULT IN REJECTION OF YOUR OFFER. If by virtue of this amendment you desire to change an offer already submitted, such change may be made by letter or electronic communication, provided each letter or electronic communication makes reference to the solicitation and this amendment, and is received prior to the opening hour and date specified.

12. ACCOUNTING AND APPROPRIATION DATA (*If required*) Modification Amount: \$4,700,211.28
 See Schedule Modification Obligated Amount: \$4,700,211.28

13. THIS ITEM APPLIES ONLY TO MODIFICATIONS OF CONTRACTS/ORDERS. IT MODIFIES THE CONTRACT/ORDER NUMBER AS DESCRIBED IN ITEM 14.

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| CHECK ONE | A. THIS CHANGE ORDER IS ISSUED PURSUANT TO: (<i>Specify authority</i>) THE CHANGES SET FORTH IN ITEM 14 ARE MADE IN THE CONTRACT ORDER NUMBER IN ITEM 10A. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | B. THE ABOVE NUMBERED CONTRACT/ORDER IS MODIFIED TO REFLECT THE ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES (<i>such as changes in paying office, appropriation data, etc.</i>) SET FORTH IN ITEM 14, PURSUANT TO THE AUTHORITY OF FAR 43.103(b). |
| X | C. THIS SUPPLEMENTAL AGREEMENT IS ENTERED INTO PURSUANT TO AUTHORITY OF:
FAR 52.243-2 Alternate I; FAR 43.103(a)(3) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | D. OTHER (<i>Specify type of modification and authority</i>) |

E. IMPORTANT: Contractor is not is required to sign this document and return 1 copies to the issuing office.

14. DESCRIPTION OF AMENDMENT/MODIFICATION (*Organized by UCF section headings, including solicitation/contract subject matter where feasible.*)

Please see attached.

Except as provided herein, all terms and conditions of the document referenced in Item 9A or 10A, as heretofore changed, remains unchanged and in full force and effect.

15A. NAME AND TITLE OF SIGNER (<i>Type or print</i>) Toyin Tomori Director, Contract Administration	16A. NAME AND TITLE OF CONTRACTING OFFICER (<i>Type or print</i>) Joseph Gibbs, contract specialist 202-245-6016 Joseph.Gibbs@ed.gov		
15B. CONTRACTOR/OFFEROR Toyin Tomori Digitally signed by Toyin Tomori Date: 2022.12.02 13:13:19 -05'00' (Signature of person authorized to sign)	15C. DATE SIGNED 12/02/2022	16B. UNITED STATES OF AMERICA JOSEPH GIBBS Digitally signed by JOSEPH GIBBS Date: 2022.12.05 08:32:48 -05'00' (Signature of Contracting Officer)	16C. DATE SIGNED NOV 30, 2022

The purpose of this modification is to:

- (1) Provide incremental funding in the amount of \$4,700,211.28
- (2) Incorporate a revised Schedule of Deliverables
- (3) Incorporate a revised Performance Work Statement (PWS)

The total obligated amount for this modification has increased by \$4,700,211.28, from \$4,819,885.02 to \$9,520,096.30.

**Contractor Statement of
Release**

In consideration of the modification agreed to herein as complete Equitable Adjustments, the contractor hereby releases the Government from any and all liability under this contract for further adjustments attributable to such facts or circumstances giving rise to this change.

SCHEDULE Continued

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ITEM NO.	SUPPLIES/SERVICES	QUANTITY	UNIT	UNIT PRICE	AMOUNT
0007	<p>Contracting Officer: Joseph Gibbs, 202-245-6016, Joseph.Gibbs@ed.gov</p> <p>Primary Contracting Officer Representative: Amy Johnson, 202-208-7849, amy.johnson@ed.gov</p> <p>Alternate Contracting Officer Representative(s): Elizabeth Nolan, 312-730-1532, Elizabeth.Nolan@ed.gov</p> <p>Primary Technical Point of Contact: Lauren Angelo, 202-219-2180, Lauren.Angelo@ed.gov</p> <p>Alternate Technical Point(s) of Contact: None</p> <p>(New Line Item)</p> <p>Regional Educational Laboratories (REL) Central CPFF CLIN (non-travel)</p>	1.00	SE	4,645,211.28	4,645,211.28
0008	<p>Accounting and Appropriation Data:</p> <p>1100M2023.B.2023.ER000000.RL2.2550A.000.117. 0000.000000 \$3,327,708.08</p> <p>1100M2022.B.2023.ER000000.RL2.2550A.000.117. 0000.000000 \$1,317,503.20</p> <p>(New Line Item)</p> <p>Travel CPSS CLIN</p>	1.00	SE	55,000.00	55,000.00

ED 002570

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**SECTION J
LIST OF ATTACHMENTS**

J.1 Attachment A- REL Performance Work Statement

Version Date: November 3, 2022

Performance Work Statement

Regional Educational Laboratory Program, 2022 Cycle

I. Procurement Purpose and Authorizing Legislation

The U.S. Department of Education (the Department) intends to award nine 60-month contracts to qualified entities to serve as the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) for nine of the 10 REL regions.¹ See Appendix A for the names of the regions and their constituent states or jurisdictions. Each REL will be part of a program of 10 RELs authorized under the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA) of 2002, Part D, Section 174 (20 U.S.C. 9564). The REL Program is administered by the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE) at the Institute of Education Sciences (IES)² in the US Department of Education (the Department).

The authorizing legislation directs RELs to carry out applied research and development, disseminate findings from scientifically valid research, provide support for using research in education decision-making, and coordinate their activities with other technical assistance entities funded through the U.S. Department of Education, such as the Comprehensive Centers and the Equity Assistance Centers. REL products and services must be completed to the quality specifications required by IES.

II. Introduction to the 2022 REL Cycle

The purpose of each REL is to assist practitioners and policymakers in their work to improve outcomes for learners in its region—from early childhood to adulthood—by supporting stakeholders in the generation and use of research, evidence, and evidence-based practices. To achieve that purpose, RELs: (1) conduct applied research and development; (2) design and implement training, coaching, and technical support activities that emphasize building capacity to use data and information to drive change; and (3) disseminate scientifically valid research, evidence-based practices, and supporting materials that allow stakeholders to apply this knowledge to their own practice.

All REL work must be both rigorous and high leverage.

¹ The REL Southwest contract cycle is 11 months behind the other RELs and will be awarded in fall 2022.

² <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/rschstat/leg/PL107-279.pdf>

- REL research and development activities are *rigorous* when they meet IES' standards for work that is scientifically valid. REL training, coaching, technical assistance, and dissemination activities are rigorous when they are (a) based on practices that are evidence-based³, and (b) designed and delivered in ways that are consistent with what is known about high-quality adult learning and educator professional development experiences.
- REL work is *high leverage* when it is change-oriented, supporting consequential local, regional or statewide decisions about policies, programs, and practices designed to improve learner outcomes.

RELs Work in Partnership with Key Stakeholder Groups

Working in partnership with key stakeholder groups⁴ is central to the success of the REL Program. RELs are expected to engage partners – that is, leaders and decisionmakers representing key stakeholder groups who work directly in partnership with the REL – in the design, execution, and evaluation⁵ of their activities. Projects that involve key stakeholders in defining their needs and co-designing activities to address these needs are best situated to develop high-quality products and professional learning experiences. An example of such a project is the co-development of activities and/or products that address pressing questions of practice, communicates technically accurate content in plain-spoken ways, and is useful for the intended audience. Similarly, high leverage work as defined above is not possible without RELs working in partnership.⁶

RELs have worked with state departments of education, school districts, and other education stakeholders for more than 50 years, and have formed partnerships with educators and policymakers with the purpose of bridging research and practice for nearly a decade. IES' requirements for partnerships have changed over time. The 2012 REL cycle supported *research alliances*, defined as regional, cross-state, or cross-district groups of practitioners, policymakers, and researchers who worked together over time to use data and research to better understand and address a

³ The term "evidence-based," generally refers to Tiers 1, 2, and 3 of the evidence levels specified in the Every Student Succeeds Act. However, IES expects the RELs to look for, share, and work with the highest tier of evidence that is available.

⁴ Stakeholder groups include but are not limited to state education agencies (SEAs), local education agencies (LEAs), state and local school boards, institutes of higher education (IHEs), schools funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, as well as student, parent, and community organizations. "Key stakeholders" generally refers to those with decision-making authority and the ability to influence policy or practice in their organization. The REL program as a whole is required to allocate no less than 25 percent of the program's annual resources to meeting the needs of rural areas, as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. Additionally, each REL has a Governing Board that is comprised of the chief state school officer, or their designee, for each state or jurisdiction in a REL region, as well as other regional stakeholders. Governing Boards provide RELs strategic direction, including prioritizing which regional needs should be the focus of the REL's work.

⁵ Evaluation of activities will be discussed in the *Scope of Work/Requirements* section.

⁶ See the *Expectations for the Implementation of the REL Program* section for additional information on working in partnership.

particular education concern. In the 2017 REL cycle, *partnership* was defined more broadly than research alliances had been under the previous cycle, emphasizing specific features of partnership work. Such features included clear, specific, and actionable outcomes for improvement of some aspect of education; clear strategies for building the capacity of members of the partnership; regular communication with partners; and a commitment to collaborate on a coherent, integrated, well-planned set of activities.

In the 2022 REL cycle, IES emphasizes *working in partnership to improve student outcomes*. This approach privileges no specific functional form, theory of change, or composition. Instead, the work of RELs should be purpose-built to meet partners' specific needs. So long as the partner (1) identifies the high leverage need to be addressed, and (2) is actively involved in the design, execution and evaluation of a project or set of related projects, work is considered to be done in partnership. Sets of REL projects done in partnership may take different forms and involve different members across the duration of the work. There are few restrictions on the groups with which RELs may partner, or how REL's work in partnership is realized.

RELs Conduct Three Types of Activities

The authorizing legislation for the REL Program requires that RELs conduct three main activities: (1) applied research, which in this cycle IES explicitly extends to include *development activities* that translate scientifically valid evidence into tools for practitioners and interventions to meet unaddressed educator needs; (2) technical assistance related to application and use of scientifically valid research; and (3) dissemination of scientifically valid research. IES expects most REL partnerships will leverage activities of each type to meet their outcomes.

Each type of activity is described here in an intentionally general manner. IES allows flexibility for RELs and their partners to undertake work under each of these activities that best fits their needs. The *Scope of Work/Requirements* section provides additional detail on each activity type.

Training, coaching, and technical support for use of research

ESRA defines technical assistance as:

A) assistance in identifying, selecting, or designing solutions based on research, including professional development and high-quality training to implement solutions leading to— (i) improved educational and other practices and classroom instruction based on scientifically valid research; and (ii) improved planning, design, and administration of programs; (B) assistance in interpreting, analyzing, and utilizing statistics and evaluations; and (C) other assistance necessary to encourage the improvement of teaching and learning through the applications of techniques supported by scientifically valid research.⁷

⁷ See 20 USC § 9501 (23).

RELs meet this mandate by conducting training, coaching, and technical support (TCTS) activities. In general, the REL Program focuses its TCTS work on activities that leverage RELs' unique expertise in rigorous research, evaluation, and the design and use of evidence-based practices. All TCTS activities should be aligned to the existing evidence base or involve building stakeholder capacity to build new evidence where little or none exists. TCTS that has as its primary aim the implementation of an "off-the-shelf" evidence-based practice, absent complementary activities that leverage REL capacities, should be supported by other education technical assistance providers.

TCTS projects may stand alone or be used in service of other activity types such as applied research and development projects. For example, TCTS activities can occur before or during an applied research project to help partners understand existing evidence or collect local, relevant data on the high leverage topic of interest. TCTS activities can also occur after an applied research project is completed with the goal of exploring implications of, and next steps from, the research. These activities are discussed in more detail in the *Scope of Work/Requirements* section under Task 4.

Applied research and development

ESRA describes *applied research* as directed to the advancement of practice in education. It addresses complex questions about teaching and learning; the organization of schools and systems; access to educational opportunity; learner success; and how education relates to, and prepares learners for, success in life and work. *Development* refers to the systematic use of knowledge to create products or processes; here, those products should support stakeholders' efforts to improve learner outcomes.⁸

The applied research and development work conducted by RELs must be high leverage. That is, it should be change-oriented, supporting consequential local or regional decisions about policies, programs, and practices designed to improve learner outcomes. Ideally, the knowledge and tools developed by individual RELs would be generalizable to multiple contexts. However, this is not a requirement provided the applied research or development product meets the needs of local or regional stakeholders. Similarly, applied research and development products may take any appropriate format so long as they are designed to be both useful to and used by decisionmakers or practitioners.

Applied research and development tasks are discussed in more detail in the *Scope of Work/Requirements* section under Task 5. Offerors should take special note of Subtask 5.2, which requires each REL to develop at least one research-based toolkit to support educators' use of evidence-based practices found in [What Works Clearinghouse™ Practice Guides](#).

⁸ ESRA contrasts applied research and development with *basic research*, which does not necessarily have immediate or obvious implications for practice. Both types of research differ from other forms of information-gathering, such as compiling facts or statistics, documenting policies without analysis or scholarly interpretation, or generating and reporting on performance indicators.

Dissemination

ESRA defines *dissemination* as:

*the communication and transfer of the results of scientifically valid research, statistics, and evaluations, in forms that are understandable, easily accessible, and usable, or adaptable for use in, the improvement of educational practice by teachers, administrators, librarians, other practitioners, researchers, parents, policymakers, and the public, through technical assistance, publications, electronic transfer, and other means.*⁹

RELs are honest brokers and effective synthesizers of scientifically valid information in an age where information of varying quality is ubiquitous and readily transmitted. IES's goal is for the REL "brand" of dissemination to convey quality, objectivity, and timeliness. When possible, REL dissemination activities should include opportunities to learn and connect with others.

Dissemination products and activities should be understandable, easily accessible, and usable. Products should not require substantial additional adaptation by stakeholders for use in the improvement of educational practice or the informing of educational policy.

REL's dissemination activities and products should also be *strategic*. Dissemination activities, products, and strategies should be developed and implemented to advance partnership work and the outcomes REL partners and other key stakeholders intend to achieve in their locality, state, or region. Except where otherwise specified, dissemination activities specifically designed for national audiences are a secondary consideration of individual RELs.

These activities are discussed in more detail in the *Scope of Work/Requirements* section under Task 6.

III. Expectations for the Implementation of the REL Program

As stated in the *Introduction to the 2022 REL Cycle*, the purpose of each REL is to support stakeholders in the use of research and evidence to improve outcomes for learners in its region from early childhood to adulthood. Current and previous REL cycles have demonstrated that there are many ways RELs can achieve this goal.

In general, the needs, desired outcomes, and context of their partners should inform the development and execution of REL projects. As noted above, IES believes this way of working maximizes the chances that RELs meet partner needs and help partners realize their desired outcomes. IES has identified a set of overarching expectations for how the work of the REL will be implemented, identified below.

⁹ See 20 USC § 9501 (10)

RELs shall conduct all (1) applied research and development and (2) TCTS work in partnership using the most effective structure possible. The structure and features of work done in partnership should be defined by the nature of the work RELs and their partners intend to complete and the outcomes they seek to accomplish. IES expects that RELs will engage all stakeholders whose participation in the partnership is needed to realize the partnership's outcomes. This includes but is not limited to individuals, regional or local organizations, and professional associations with the authority to set, influence, or implement policy and practice; access data; provide content or context expertise; or generate awareness of, or buy-in to, specific evidence-based actions or outcomes identified by REL partners.

Regardless of the form work done in partnership takes, IES expects *good partnering behaviors* in all relationships between RELs and their partners. REL projects shall be co-developed with the partners they are intended to serve. Additionally, REL work should be characterized by effective communication; genuine cooperation; and a mutual understanding of the context, content, outcomes and targets of the work.¹⁰

Work done in partnership shall focus on concerns that are narrowly tailored to increase the likelihood of achieving partners' desired outcomes. REL projects should emphasize deep work on a specific problem, rather than diffuse work across a broad topical area. For example, a REL project or set of projects should not focus broadly on "early childhood education" but rather on a particular issue such as "improving the skills and knowledge of early childhood educators related to 1) formatively assessing children's language and mathematics development, and 2) applying that knowledge to practice."

RELs shall work in partnership with groups within a single state or jurisdiction. The work of REL partnerships should generally focus on statewide or local needs to increase the likelihood of achieving partners' desired outcomes. IES expects that RELs will work to serve all states in their region; however, differences in policy contexts and partner needs often make it difficult for multi-state partnerships to set specific shared targets and successfully execute high leverage work. Partners within a state may include statewide organizations (for example, SEAs, state boards of education, IHEs/teacher preparation programs, or professional organizations), regional organizations (for example, Intermediary Units that support groups of schools or districts within a state), districts, or individual schools. Work may be done in partnership with representatives from any combination of these levels if doing so is necessary to achieve their outcomes. RELs may also leverage Communities of Practice to connect stakeholders across states within a REL region that have similar needs (see Subtask 3.3 in the *Scope of Work/Requirements* section).

¹⁰ Outcomes are defined by the domains within which partners wish to see change – for example, improved math proficiency rates for middle school students in New Jersey. Targets are specific, measurable, time-bound metrics associated with long-term outcomes – for example, 85 percent of middle school students achieving proficiency on the statewide mathematics assessment by 2027.

REL activities shall have a demonstrable, credible relationship to improved learner outcomes. The REL Program's purpose is to improve learner outcomes by supporting partners in the generation and use of research, evidence, and evidence-based practices. Therefore, the work of the RELs shall be actionable. That is, oriented towards solving, rather than simply describing, high-leverage problems of practice. Specifically:

- Activities should be in service of outcomes that are (a) co-designed with partners, (b) address authentic needs based on needs-sensing activities, (c) clear and measurable, and (d) have achievable, specific targets associated with these outcomes.
- Outcomes should be classified as short-term, medium-term, or long-term. Details as to the types of outcomes that are appropriate for each are described below in the *Key Outcomes for REL Work and Logic Model* section.
- Partners' long-term goals should serve as a "north star" for the work of RELs. REL work should be in service of their partners' goals (e.g., "doubling the rate of math proficiency among 3rd graders in <partner's LEA> over the next ten years"). Targets for RELs' work and outcomes vis-à-vis the partners' goal should be appropriate to the opportunities and constraints of the REL Program.
- All REL outcomes and their associated targets should be attainable within the REL cycle's current period of performance. When partners have goals that extend beyond the period of performance (e.g., "by 2030, 95% of 3rd grade students in <partner's LEA> will have achieved proficiency in math on the state test"), REL outcomes and targets should be appropriately tuned to the Program's opportunities and constraints (e.g., "At the end of the REL cycle, the REL and its partners hope to show a demonstrable increase in student growth relative to the students' baseline on all relevant domains of the progress monitoring assessment for 3rd grade math in all elementary schools in which teachers participated in trainings during the 2023-24 school year).
- Related projects developed in partnership with stakeholders will typically have the same long-term outcomes. Sets of projects co-developed with the same group may be intended to lead to distinct short- and medium-term outcomes, so long as they build on one another to help partners achieve shared long-term outcomes.
- RELs should be able to demonstrate—via logic models, theories of change, or equivalent—how activities they propose to undertake in partnership will be arrayed to meet their short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes. REL activities are a means to an end, not ends unto themselves.
- On-going monitoring of a REL's performance will be informed in part by its attainment of targets associated with short-term and medium-term

outcomes; summative evaluation of a REL's performance will be informed in part by its attainment of targets associated with long-term REL outcomes.

RELs shall focus on activities that leverage their distinctiveness in the federal technical assistance space and develop strategies for collaboration with other federal service providers to meet needs that lie outside RELs' core competencies. RELs' distinctive value in the federal technical assistance community comes from their ability (a) to conduct applied research and development work that is rigorous and high leverage, and (b) to integrate that work with training, coaching, technical support, and dissemination that is of similarly high quality. RELs must consider how partner or other stakeholder needs that do not leverage that distinctiveness—such as implementation support absent a discernable applied research and development component—should be referred to other technical assistance providers such as the Regional Comprehensive Centers. RELs shall coordinate and participate in joint needs sensing activities with other federal technical assistance providers—in particular the Regional Comprehensive Center(s) that serve their region—to help inform such decisions on where regional needs are best addressed.

RELs shall emphasize the scaling of What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) Practice Guide recommendations and should amplify and leverage scientifically valid research and evidence-based practices built or synthesized elsewhere within IES. Discovering what works in education and then ensuring that knowledge is used to improve learners' education outcomes is central to the mission of IES and the REL Program. Similarly, evidence-based practice is a central tenet of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and Every Student Succeeds Act. In the 2022 cycle, RELs support the use of evidence-based practices in two ways.

First, each REL shall develop at least one toolkit that supports scaling of WWC Practice Guide recommendations.¹¹ WWC Practice Guides have a unique role within the evidence-based practices space. Their recommendations represent the IES's current and best understanding of evidence-based practice in a given domain. Some Practice Guides present a set of recommendations in which all recommendations should be implemented to achieve the intended outcomes, while other Practice Guide recommendations may be implemented independently of the other recommendations. More information about this activity is described in the *Scope of Work/Requirements* section under Subtask 5.2.

Second, each REL shall seek to amplify evidence and evidence-based products developed by other IES programs such as the National Center for Education Research, the National Center for Special Education Research, and the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance when developing TCTS projects or dissemination materials.

¹¹ Successful offerors will be expected to develop the toolkit they propose; however, the government retains the right to make changes to this Subtask after award.

RELs shall develop and employ strategic dissemination plans based on the products developed, their intended outcomes, their target audience(s), and the networks through which evidence and evidence-based practice may be disseminated for said audience(s). A strategic dissemination plan should incorporate the context and intended outcomes of the projects as well as dissemination practices and networks that are most likely to be effective for reaching target audiences. In order to develop and execute these strategies, RELs, with input from their partners, must be able to identify key audiences positioned to support partners in achieving their intended outcomes, target dissemination products and activities towards these audiences in places and through networks and knowledge brokers so that these audience are likely to find them, and develop/disseminate products in formats that are accessible and actionable to these audiences.

IES expects that dissemination plans will require coordination across tasks – in particular, between Task 3 (Working in Partnership with Stakeholders), Task 4 (Training, Coaching and Technical Support for Evidence Use), Task 5 (Applied Research and Peer Reviewed Research-based Development Projects) and Task 6 (Dissemination). IES also expects that dissemination strategies will be individualized and tailored to each set of projects developed in partnership. Simply making products or activities available through the REL's website or Twitter account is not sufficient, nor does it reflect the level of planning or effort IES expects RELs to put forth as part of a strategic dissemination effort.

RELs shall intentionally seek opportunities to work with partners to address issues related to educational equity. Researchers have established that racial and ethnic minorities, children from low-income backgrounds, and children who are not proficient in English, oftentimes do not have the same educational opportunities as their counterparts who are White, from higher income backgrounds, and are proficient in English.¹² These disparate opportunities and resulting experiences have contributed to significant racial, economic, and English language achievement gaps,¹³ which may have been exacerbated by the Coronavirus pandemic.¹⁴ Education practitioners, policymakers, and researchers fear millions of students may have fallen further behind after the U.S. transitioned

12 U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. (2016). 2013–2014 civil rights data collection. A first look: Key data highlights on equity and opportunity gaps in our nation's public schools. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/2013-14-first-look.pdf>. (accessed 1/5/2021); Kostyo, S., Cardichon, J., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2018). Making ESSA's equity promise real: State strategies to close the opportunity gap. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved on January 5, 2021 from <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/essa-equity-promise-report>.

13 Hussar, B., Zhang, J., Hein, S., Wang, K., Roberts, A., Cui, J., Smith, M., Bullock Mann, F., Barmer, A., and Dilig, R. (2020). The Condition of Education 2020 (NCES 2020-144). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved on January 5, 2021 from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubssearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2020144>.

14 Dorn, E., Hancock, B., Sarakatsannis, J., & Viruleg, E. (2020). COVID-19 and learning loss – disparities grow and students need help. McKinsey & Company. Retrieved on January 5, 2021 from <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/covid-19-and-learning-loss-disparities-grow-and-students-need-help>.

from in-person education in March 2020 to a mostly virtual environment that resulted in inequitable access to learning opportunities for historically underserved students.¹⁵ Furthermore, the social justice movement of 2020 prompted IES to think more critically about who is included in conversations about the high leverage needs the REL Program addresses and how the Program may benefit from including more diverse stakeholder groups.

What this means for the REL Program:

- **IES encourages RELs to propose projects that have the explicit goal of addressing educational equity.** These projects might illuminate the differential experiences, opportunities, and outcomes of learners from historically underserved communities and should identify and promote effective or promising solutions for addressing these inequities. RELs play an important role in contributing to the growing body of research on how experiences within the country's education system differ by context and student group, thereby impacting outcomes, and identifying potential solutions.
- **Whenever feasible, RELs shall seek opportunities to partner with students, parents, and community stakeholders—particularly those from historically underserved communities—to determine the focus of and inform REL work.** RELs could partner with these stakeholder groups to design, execute, and interpret research studies and their findings,¹⁶ or to determine the focus of and participate in TCTS activities. RELs might also consider how to include these stakeholder groups in needs sensing activities or projects that include root cause analysis. Since REL staff may not have direct access to students, parents, or community members, LEAs, SEAs, and/or other partners may need to help facilitate this relationship. IES acknowledges that not all projects may yield themselves to including these stakeholder groups; however, it is important for the REL Program explore this new opportunity to understand how including these partners might help improve learner outcomes. IES plans to provide support to RELs to do this work successfully.

RELs shall employ strategies that integrate applied research; training, coaching, technical support; and dissemination in order to maximize the possibilities of partners meeting their short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes. REL activities can be fit discretely into one of the three categories of REL work – (1) applied research; (2) training, coaching, and technical support; or (3) dissemination. However, IES expects that RELs will realize the greatest impact for partners and stakeholders when they integrate multiple types of work within partnerships and across their entire portfolio of work. Examples of integration might include, but are not limited to developing infographics or hosting a webinar based on the findings of an applied research project; developing a TCTS project to

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ See Subtask 5.6 in the *Scope of Work and Requirements* section for additional information.

support partners' collection of data for a future applied research project; developing a coaching project to help partners determine "what's next" based on the implications of an applied research project; or developing a training project for instructional leaders based upon a toolkit or intervention developed by the REL.

The content and design of REL work shall be informed by, align with, build upon partners' existing initiatives and their efforts to improve policies and practices. RELs should (a) make all necessary efforts to understand the existing policy and practice context of all their stakeholders; (b) reflect an awareness of those contexts when planning with partners about how new activities can move them closer to achieving their outcomes; and (c) build partner capacity to execute all phases of an evidence-informed process of change.

At a minimum, REL work should be developed with an understanding of the state and local context in order to avoid duplication of effort or contradiction with existing initiatives or practices. Beyond that, REL project proposals should demonstrate how the work is part of a logical and feasible pathway to achieving partners' intended outcomes, in conjunction with other activities or initiatives taking place in partnership with, or outside of the REL. For example, a project in which the REL is supporting a networked improvement community of school curriculum leaders within a district in their efforts to help teachers identify, understand, and implement evidence-based instructional practices in early reading will be most successful if it builds upon existing teacher supports that the district provides and is followed by sustained district investment. Projects that are unable to demonstrate this – in other words, "one-off" projects that are not supported by additional REL work or partner initiatives outside of their work with the REL – are less likely to effectively support stakeholder change efforts and meet the criteria of high leverage. RELs should also coordinate with other federal technical assistance providers when designing research and training, coaching, and technical support projects to avoid duplication and maximize the benefit of federally funded supports.

Additionally, work in partnership should be designed to support partners in identifying and acting on the necessary next steps to achieve their outcomes. Part of this could include RELs acting as a thought partner to plan for what partners will do once REL supports have concluded. Another aspect of helping partners take next steps may involve reaching out to other stakeholder organizations with whom partners may not typically work. Partners for REL projects may include many, but not all, of the decisionmakers whose buy-in is necessary for achieving intended outcomes. In these cases, the REL could work in partnership to build the knowledge and capacity of partners to be able to clearly and persuasively champion potential evidence-based changes to outside decisionmakers and other stakeholders. Therefore, the REL, through partnerships, will need to become knowledgeable not only of their partners and their partners' contexts, but also of their partners' relationships to other key decisionmakers and the organizational processes of each relevant group.

REL activities shall be designed and executed in a culturally responsive manner. RELs shall make all necessary efforts to understand the cultural context

of their partners at the state, region, district, or school level and use that knowledge to design and conduct high leverage work.

Cultural context can have several meanings, but generally relates to how stakeholders interact within education and social systems and their beliefs, values, norms and behaviors. RELs should recognize that these beliefs, values, norms, and behaviors are likely to be different across the various stakeholder groups within a system. As RELs think about how to best meet their partners' needs around a given topic, they should also seek to understand the answers to questions such as: What does each relevant stakeholder group believe is the problem? What current norms might support or inhibit the adoption of a new practice or policy? What role does tradition play and how can it be used to support change?

REL personnel shall include researchers with significant and demonstrated scholarly expertise in content areas and methodologies relevant to the work the REL undertakes as well as practitioners who have significant experience teaching and leading professional development in those content areas. RELs shall develop a team that includes experts of several types, listed below:

- Content experts who possess a broad and deep perspective on what is known and what still is not settled in a research field. They enable the REL to frame important research questions and TCTS activities so that they both address immediate needs for evidence, as well as advance knowledge more broadly through applied research.
- Lead authors of REL reports who shall have demonstrated expertise in the content area being addressed by the report, shown through a substantial portfolio of peer-reviewed, published work in that area.¹⁷
- Methodological experts who ensure high leverage research questions are answered using appropriate methods and support the intended outcomes of the project.
- Current or recent practitioners who provide project staff additional context on problems of practice educators are facing.
- Experts in adult learning or professional development who can lead and inform the design and conduct of TCTS activities.

IES expects that the REL shall seek content expertise from a variety of sources, including universities or other firms, and shall adjust its mix of content expertise as new regional needs arise.

REL products shall be clear, engaging, relevant, and actionable. Products should be written for an informed lay audience. Non-researchers with limited statistical backgrounds should be able to understand key takeaways and implications from all products, including applied research. RELs shall incorporate

¹⁷ See <https://eric.ed.gov/?selection> for IES' definition of peer-reviewed.

formative feedback from at least one representative of the target audience when developing products to maximize their relevance, usability and actionability. RELs are encouraged to use multiple formats and to develop supplemental products to support research findings to make these findings as clear, engaging, relevant, accessible and actionable as possible to multiple audiences.

IES' primary concern is that the REL products are actionable for partners toward achieving their outcomes (see earlier expectation related to strategic dissemination). However, REL products should also be nationally relevant whenever possible so that other states, districts, and schools can adapt and implement the research knowledge, tools and trainings created through the REL partnership. RELs shall provide sufficient contextual information as a part of each applied research product so that users may be able to compare the context in which the work was conducted to their own when considering its relevance.

Applied research products shall incorporate quantitative methodologies best suited to answer partners' questions and address their high leverage needs. Applied research under the REL Program may use any quantitative methods, ranging from descriptive statistics to causal models, that are appropriate to meet partner needs. As discussed above, IES expects REL products to be high-leverage and actionable, with a focus on achieving partners' medium- and long-term outcomes. Therefore, while descriptive research is permitted, IES expects that descriptive research will not be conducted as a stand-alone project and will instead be combined with other REL supports that help partners and other stakeholders apply research evidence to policy or practice. For the purposes of research under the REL Program, qualitative research methods are typically best used in combination with quantitative methods rather than in isolation. For example, case study data can be used to provide examples of the types of implementation approaches that may be listed in survey response categories within an implementation evaluation.

IES encourages RELs to look for opportunities to conduct studies that build upon extant data by collecting data on implementation in real time in order to help stakeholders understand the variation in implementation, the challenges associated with implementation and educators' strategies for overcoming these challenges. Such studies would need to be launched early in the contract cycle because they would likely require Office of Management and Budget (OMB) clearance after the study proposal was approved by IES before the study could begin, as well as additional time to recruit participants and collect data.¹⁸

IV. Key outcomes for REL work and logic model

IES has identified several short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes anticipated from the work of RELs and the REL Program (see Figure 1). Given the wide variety

¹⁸ The OMB clearance process takes a minimum of five months.

of topics and activities of REL projects, it would be nearly impossible to capture every potential input, activity, output, and outcome of REL work. The logic model depicted in Figure 1 represents a high-level overview of the work of RELs and of the REL Program itself. IES does not include arrows linking specific inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes in this model. However, IES' expectation is that as each REL co-develops and executes their scope of work they will demonstrate through logic models how specific components of their models are linked for each set of projects developed in partnership (see Task 3 under *Scope of Work and Requirements* for additional information).

As noted in the *Expectations for Implementation of the REL Program* section, RELs will be expected to work with their partners to co-develop and periodically update detailed logic models, theories of action or equivalent for each set of projects developed in partnership.¹⁹ Measurement plans that allow the REL to quantify their progress toward achieving specified targets associated with short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes are also required. While the specific short- or medium-term outcomes in REL logic models might not match those in Figure 1, all applied research, coaching, training, and technical support activities shall be designed to support partners in meeting at least one of the five types of long-term outcomes listed in Figure 1.

Inputs

Although each REL project will include distinct inputs, some inputs should be common across any REL project. These include the experience and expertise in research, policy, and practice that RELs and their partners bring to a project. Partners' connections to other key stakeholders and their contextual knowledge is also a valuable input.

Buy-in on the part of partners, and the availability of REL and partner resources is also necessary. For RELs and partners, this includes time commitments necessary to be responsive to communication and participate in meetings or activities. This also includes time and effort to take the necessary steps to further project outcomes; for example, facilitating access to data for an applied research study or making phone calls to set up meetings with additional key stakeholders whose buy-in is critical for a project to meet its medium- or long-term outcomes.

This may also involve financial resources, such as RELs using travel funds to accommodate a face-to-face meeting with partners, or partners paying for substitute teachers so that teacher leaders may attend a REL coaching or training session.

Activities and Outputs

¹⁹ This will also be required for single (stand-alone) projects lasting more than six months; while IES expects most if not all REL work to be done through multiple projects with a set of stakeholders, IES will make limited allowances for stand-alone projects if the REL demonstrates the high-leverage nature of the proposed work.

REL activities and outputs are described in greater detail in both the *Expectations for the Implementation of the REL Program* and *Scope of Work and Requirements* sections. While there are some broad categories of REL activities and outputs listed in the REL Program Logic Model, this is not meant to be an exhaustive list of all possible activities RELs may pursue. Similarly, RELs will have flexibility in proposing what types of outputs or products are developed within these broad categories outlined in the REL Program Logic Model so long as the content and structure of each activity and output is clearly, directly, and credibly linked to specific outcomes, particularly the medium- and long-term outcomes listed in Figure 1.

Short- Term Outcomes

Short-term outcomes of REL activities usually include building partners' knowledge and/or capacity for understanding research and translating that research or evidence into practice. Capacity building may include improving partner and/or stakeholder capacity to access, analyze, and interpret data, critically examine the quality of research evidence, or effectively communicate research findings and their implications to other key stakeholders. Short-term outcomes are not limited to capacity building, but other short-term outcomes typically follow some type of increase in partner capacity. These can include, but are not limited to, partners identifying a specific practice that they wish to adopt or adapt or increased support for an evidence-informed action among key stakeholders not directly involved as partners for a project.

Medium- Term Outcomes

Medium-term outcomes usually include partners or other key stakeholders taking action to change policy or behaviors, such as the adoption and implementation of a policy or practice. (Sustaining a policy or practice proven to be effective can also be a medium-term outcome.) Sustained implementation of continuous improvement processes among partners is also considered a medium-term outcome that can lead to other medium-term outcomes such as the identification, adaption, and adoption of new practices and policies. In cases where projects are completed near the end of the REL cycle, medium-term outcomes may not be observable until the end of the contract cycle.

Long- Term Outcomes

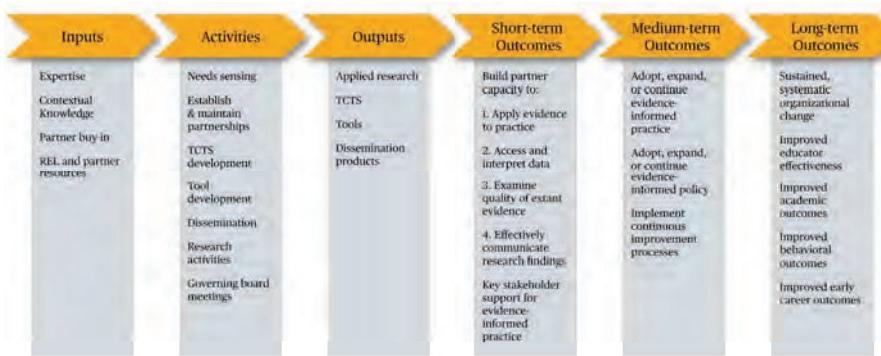
As discussed under the *Expectations for the Implementation of the REL Program* section, REL outcomes and targets should be appropriately tuned to the Program's opportunities and constraints, while also being informed by partners' goals, which should act as a "north star" to inform REL outcomes.

Most REL partners' long-term goals of interest are improvements in meaningful measures of learner achievement (e.g., end-of-grade proficiency tests, graduation, or entering the workforce). Those goals typically have distinct numeric targets partners hope to achieve. Other long-term goals may include sustained, systematic organizational change and improved educator effectiveness, precursors to the learner academic, behavioral, or workforce outcomes that are typically of interest

to state and local practitioners and policymakers. Often, partners cast these goals and their associated targets as being in the more distant future, years after the REL contract will end.

While acknowledging that partners' long-term goals of interest may not be achievable within the timeline of the REL cycle, RELs should identify targets for their projects' long-term outcomes that are (1) consistent with the partner's long-term goal but (2) *attainable within the period of performance*. Per the example mentioned under *Highlighted Expectations for the Implementation of the REL Program*, a partner might set a districtwide proficiency rate target of 95% by 2030 for grade 3 standardized test scores in mathematics, while the REL adopts a long-term outcome of a demonstrable increase in student growth by the end of the REL period of performance relative to the students' baseline on all relevant domains of the mathematics progress monitoring assessment for 3rd grade in all elementary schools in which teachers participated in trainings during the 2023-24 school year. The REL would be expected to report both students' baseline scores and the latest available student scores at the end of the contract period. The target associated with the long-term outcome should be specific and narrow, yet aligned to the partner's long-term goal, with the presumption that a successful districtwide scaling effort would allow the district to achieve their long-term goal by 2030.

Offerors are encouraged to identify high-leverage projects, or sets of projects, to be done in partnership as early as possible in the contract cycle so that there is sufficient time in the REL contract to support the partners in achieving the medium- and long-term outcomes. However, RELs may propose sets of related projects to be done in partnership that include individual projects which may not be completed until the last few months of the REL contract, meaning that there may not be time to examine the associated long-term outcomes of that project. Such projects are allowable on a limited basis so long as the REL demonstrates the high-leverage nature of the proposed work and clearly outlines actions their partners are likely to take on their own after the REL contract expires to support their long-term outcomes. RELs are still expected to identify their partners' long-term outcomes and targets beyond the REL cycle even in such cases.

**Figure 1. REL Program Logic Model**

Problem statement: States, districts, and schools across the Pre-K-20 spectrum have goals related to improving student outcomes. Many states, districts and schools are interested in, or sometimes required to, implement evidence-based policies and practices as a way of reaching those goals. RELs are in a position to leverage their research expertise and their partners' contextual knowledge to build partner and/or stakeholder capacity to determine and implement evidence-informed actions that ultimately support the improvement of student outcomes. While this model is intentionally general as it relates to the outputs, short- and medium-term outcomes of REL work, all REL projects should have at least one of the five types of long-term outcomes in this logic model. That outcome should be specific and measurable.

V. Scope of work and requirements

Task 1: REL Management and Reporting

Subtask 1.1 Participate in a kickoff call with ED and attend a REL kickoff meeting.

Within one week after the effective date of the contract, the REL shall schedule a call with the IES's Contracting Officer's Representative (COR), Contracting Officer (CO), and Contract Specialist (CS) to introduce the key personnel and discuss expectations of the in-person program-wide kickoff meeting to be held within five weeks of contract award. The REL shall bring three personnel, including the Director and Deputy Director, to meet in Washington, DC with the COR, CO, CS for the contract kick-off meeting. Within two weeks after the meeting, the REL shall submit a summary of the meeting discussions, including any outstanding issues raised and plans to address these issues.

Subtask 1.2 Communicate regularly with IES.

The REL – at a minimum, the Director and Deputy Director – shall participate in regularly scheduled (at least twice per month) meetings with the COR to discuss issues related to the REL contract, including any anticipated problems and proposed solutions to those problems, and update the COR on key milestones for REL projects. The REL shall send an agenda for the call at least two working days before each call so that both the REL and COR are aware of the main issues that will be addressed during the call. Within five working days following each meeting, the REL shall prepare a memo summarizing the key issues and concerns raised at the meeting and how each will be addressed.

The Director or Deputy Director shall communicate with the COR on a regular basis, such as by phone or email, to discuss urgent points and follow-up as needed.

Subtask 1.3 Attend biannual REL Program meetings.

The REL – specifically, the Director and one other key personnel²⁰ – shall attend two, one- to two-day REL Program meetings. Meetings may be in person in Washington DC, or virtual. The first REL Program meeting will be in person. The purpose of these meetings is to discuss issues and accomplishments related to the REL and the REL Program and consider ways to improve the functioning or outcomes of the REL Program. IES will coordinate the logistics for this REL Program meeting.

Subtask 1.4 Present REL portfolio annually to Department staff.

The REL shall present current and proposed work to REL Program and other invited IES and Department of Education staff in Washington, DC annually

²⁰ The REL Director, Deputy Director, and task leads are considered key personnel for the REL contracts.

beginning in Year 2 of the contract. The purpose of the presentation is to ensure that other Department staff are aware of REL work and can discuss how this work connects or could potentially connect with other Department work. The REL shall submit briefing materials to the COR at least three weeks before the meeting. At least three REL staff shall plan on attending the one-day meeting. Within one week of each portfolio presentation, the REL shall submit a summary memo of items discussed at the meeting.

Subtask 1.5 Identify, establish, maintain, and convene the Governing Board.

The REL shall effectively manage all tasks with guidance from a statutorily required Governing Board, as specified in Section 174(h) of ESRA. The REL shall appoint members to the REL Governing Board to meet the following requirements:

- The composition of the REL Governing Board shall represent the interests of all states and other appropriate constituencies in the region.
- The REL shall offer every chief state school officer in the region the opportunity to serve on the REL Governing Board, or to designate a personal representative to serve.
- The composition of the REL Governing Board shall include a diversity of expertise and experience, including education researchers, educators, and individuals representing the interests of learners in economically disadvantaged areas, both rural and urban, and other underserved learners; see Section 174(h) of ESRA for additional information on the composition of the Governing Board.
- The REL Governing Board shall be separate from the REL's corporate board and shall meet on a different day from any corporate board meeting.
- The REL Governing Board shall convene at least two times each year, and these meetings may be held virtually or in-person.²¹ Additional meetings of the REL Governing Board may be conducted as needed. In-person meetings shall be at least one full day to allow ample time for the board to fulfill its duties. All in-person meetings shall be held at a location within the region.
- The REL shall ensure that members clearly understand the roles, responsibilities, and the procedures of the REL Governing Board. This includes ensuring that all REL Governing Board members are onboarded, and are kept informed of the work of the REL between meetings so that the REL Governing Board may maximize the time available during Board meetings to fulfill their responsibilities, including:

²¹ "In-person" Governing Board meetings may be hybrid (in-person with an option to attend virtually) if necessary to improve attendance.

- o Identifying and sharing the needs of the education constituency they represent with the REL.
- o Providing strategic guidance on REL work and how the REL shall carry out its activities for maximum effectiveness and efficiency towards addressing regional needs and fulfilling intended outcomes, reduce unnecessary activities and/or activities redundant with other activities in the region, increase collaboration and resource sharing, and other activities as specified in Section 174(h) of ESRA. Governing Board members are expected to provide timely input and guidance on the needs and projects that impact the constituency they represent.
- o Leveraging their connections within the region to amplify products developed by RELs and the WWC to relevant stakeholders or organizations.

RELs shall provide Governing Board members the opportunity to provide meaningful input and guidance on projects that impact the constituency they represent, as those projects are being proposed and executed. Because the work of the REL will be proposed, approved, and executed on a rolling basis, biannual Governing Board meetings should not be the only opportunity Governing Board members have to provide such input and guidance. RELs are expected to communicate with their Governing Board members on a consistent basis to provide them the information they need to fulfill their duties in a timely manner.

Within five weeks of the effective date of the contract, the REL shall submit to IES a report on the establishment of the REL Governing Board, board procedures, a list of members, and analysis of how the Governing Board meets the representational requirements.

The first REL Governing Board meeting shall be held within the first ten weeks of the contract effective date. After the initial meeting, meeting agendas shall be created in consultation with the Governing Board members at least 6 weeks before the Governing Board meeting occurs. The meeting agenda shall reflect a commitment by the REL to engage the Governing Board members actively in the decision-making of the REL. The agenda and meeting materials shall be submitted for approval by IES at least three weeks before each meeting. The REL shall submit to IES minutes, actions, and a discussion of how the REL will use Governing Board feedback to adjust their proposed or ongoing work within two weeks after each meeting.

RELs shall also keep their COR informed of potential additions to or resignations from their Governing Board. While the addition of new Governing Board members must be approved by current Governing Board members, RELs shall propose new Governing Board members to the COR in advance of proposing members to the Governing Board, and provide the COR with a justification as to why a potential Governing Board member is well situated to further the work of the REL.

Subtask 1.6 Submit a Bi-annual Assessment of Progress Report.

The Bi-annual Assessment of Progress will serve as a living document that provides the most up-to-date information about the REL's work. The Bi-annual Assessment of Progress should offer a retrospective review of the REL's work to date, with a short description of next steps if the partnerships or projects lend themselves to future work. RELs will not propose new work in the Bi-annual Assessment of Progress, as RELs are permitted and encouraged to propose new projects throughout the year as needs in the region arise.

The REL shall use the plan included in the contract proposal to inform the first Bi-Annual Assessment of Progress, with more guidance to follow post award. This initial report will not require an assessment of progress or lessons learned from collaborating and coordinating with partners. In subsequent submissions, each task will be updated. Tasks 1 and 2 will likely require minimal updates. The remainder of the Bi-Assessment of Progress will be organized by sets of projects in partnership and it shall include, but may not be limited to: (1) a description of approved and active partnerships; (2) the composition of each partnership; (3) a logic model and accompanying narrative that depicts and describes relationships between projects and their alignment to short-term, medium-term, and long-term outcomes of the partnership; (4) measurable targets for each outcome; (5) a measurement plan aligned to each outcome; and (6) an assessment of progress toward meeting partnerships' short-term and medium-term outcomes and targets, (7) lessons learned from collaborating and coordinating with partners; and (8) the names of partnership leads and principal investigators for research, training, coaching, and technical support projects. Any projects that are not associated with an approved partnership shall be organized by jurisdiction. RELs shall include information for non-partnership projects similar to what is required for the partnership projects, with the exception of the logic model requirements.

The first Bi-Annual Assessment of Progress is due within 14 weeks of the contract effective date. All subsequent Bi-Annual Assessments of Progress will be due every six months (each October and April) through April 2026. The COR will review and provide initial comments within three weeks of submission. The REL shall assume at least one round of revisions to the initial report and subsequent Bi-Annual Assessments of progress, with revised versions of the report to be submitted within two weeks of receiving COR feedback until the report is approved.

Subtask 1.7 Prepare and submit Monthly Progress Reports

The REL shall submit a Monthly Progress Report, due within 10 working days after the end of each month. The Monthly Progress Report shall include the following summaries:

- Major activities under each task and accomplishments—including any relevant data on progress towards partnerships' targets.
- Needs related to applied research or training, coaching, or technical support that have been identified by the REL through its interactions with regional stakeholders.
- Participation in cross-REL coordination activities.

- Coordination and collaboration with Comprehensive Centers, other Technical Assistance Providers, and other IES investments as well as referrals to other Department resources the REL has provided to stakeholders.
- Budget and expenditures for the period and cumulatively by Subtask, and by project under Tasks 4 and 5, with a clear identification of the extent of budget devoted to and resources spent on activities in rural areas. The budget and expenditure documents shall clearly indicate the labor hours spent on each Task and Subtask during the prior month and cumulatively since the project began by individual staff. In addition, under Tasks 4 and 5, the budget documents shall indicate the expenditures and labor hours spent for each project by individual staff during the prior month and cumulatively since the project began.
- Unexpected challenges, delays, or other issues that need to be addressed. If these delays result in revisions to the project timeline, RELs shall include a complete timeline for remaining project activities in the Monthly Progress Report.
- Major activities planned for the next month, including a schedule of deliverable submissions.

Subtask 1.8 Submit performance data relevant to the Department's strategic plan.

IES is required to submit an Annual Performance Plan (APP) with its annual Budget request to Congress. The APP identifies performance measures to accomplish the strategic objectives represented in the Department's Strategic Plan. The REL shall submit project-level data, up to five times a year, on performance measures identified by the COR. Specific reporting guidance will be provided by IES.

Subtask 1.9 Comply with IES' REL Employee Personnel Security Clearance Policy.

All REL positions will be designated as either a no-risk, low-risk or moderate-risk level. Within the first week of the contract start date the REL shall appoint a security liaison who shall submit a list of all staff on the contract with the appropriate position risk level designation. The REL security liaison shall submit the required documentation for all REL staff assigned a low or moderate risk to the IES security team within two weeks of contract start date, and as needed for REL staff added over the life of the contract.²² The security liaison shall be responsible for submitting the required documentation for staff from the prime contractor and any subcontractors. Additionally, REL staff shall complete periodic cybersecurity and records management training provided by IES. See *Appendix D: Records Management Obligations* for more information.

²² See Appendix F of the Instructions to Offerors for additional information on personnel security and clearance policy.

Subtask 1.10 Participate in REL Program Evaluation.

IES intends to conduct an independent evaluation of each REL and the REL Program itself. The REL shall cooperate with IES' requests for information and other types of assistance needed to conduct the evaluation. Information requests and assistance may include, for example, providing details about upcoming and past TCTS activities or facilitating the evaluation contractor's collection of data from REL partners. In addition, the REL shall plan to participate in two-day site visits from REL evaluation contractor staff in both Years 2 and 3 of the REL contract. Three REL staff shall participate in the two-day site visit, including both the Director and Deputy Director as well as one additional person to be determined in Year 2. The REL shall also be prepared to discuss with the REL evaluation contractor the feasibility of conducting a random controlled trial (RCT) or quasi-experimental design (QED) study of one of the REL's partnerships or projects. This discussion would occur in Year 2 of the REL contract and the RCT or QED would begin in Year 2 or Year 3 of the REL contract. The REL shall cooperate with the REL evaluation contractor in the implementation of this RCT or QED if such a study is deemed feasible.

Subtask 1.11 Prepare and submit final contract report.

Two months before the end of the period of performance, the REL shall submit a draft report that describes its key accomplishments and success in meeting targets established for partnerships' short-term, medium-term, and long-term outcomes of interest. For outcomes that are outside the timeframe of this contract, the REL shall provide information on their partners' plans to achieve these outcomes. IES will provide additional guidance on the specific format and content of the report. The final report is anticipated to be no more than 40 pages in length.

The COR will review the report and provide comments within four weeks. The REL shall incorporate the COR's comments for the final report. The final report shall be submitted two months before the end of the contract period.

Task 1 Deliverables

Table 1 provides a list of required deliverables for work conducted under Task 1, as well as their due dates. RELs and IES may negotiate on to add deliverables as appropriate.

Table 1: Task 1 Deliverables

Subtask	Deliverables	Due Date
1.1	Summary of REL Kickoff Meeting	2 weeks after the kickoff meeting
1.2	Communicate regularly with IES Biweekly/Bimonthly call agenda	2 working days before each meeting
	Biweekly/Bimonthly call summary memo	5 working days following each meeting
1.4	Present REL portfolio annually to Department staff Department presentation briefing	3 weeks before each meeting

	materials	
	Summary of presentation to the Department	1 week after each meeting
1.5	Identify, establish, maintain, and convene the Governing Board	
	Report on the establishment of the Governing Board	Within 5 weeks of the effective date of the contract
	Meeting agendas and materials for Governing Board Meeting	3 weeks before the meeting
	Governing Board meeting minutes, action items and discussion of how the REL will use Governing Board feedback to adjust their proposed or ongoing work	2 weeks after each meeting
	Submission of proposed Governing Board members to fill vacancies	As needed
1.6	Bi-annual Assessment of Progress Report	Within 14 weeks of the effective date of the contract, the first working day of October and April through April 2026
1.7	Monthly Progress Report	Within 10 working days after the end of each month
1.8	Performance reporting	As requested
1.9	Submission of security documents for low- and moderate- level clearances	Within two weeks of the effective date of the contract, as needed
1.10	REL evaluation materials	As requested
1.11	Final contract report	Two months before the end of the period of performance

Task 2: Coordination and Collaboration

Individual RELs shall coordinate and collaborate with other RELs. Individual RELs should also coordinate with other U.S Department of Education-funded centers and technical assistance entities, including Research and Development (R&D) centers funded by IES and the regional and national Comprehensive Centers. The key purposes for this coordination and collaboration are to share and synthesize information, ideas, and lessons learned; to enable each type of provider to focus on its designated role; to ensure that work is non-duplicative; to streamline and simplify service provision to states and districts; and to collaborate on projects in order to better support regional stakeholders.

Subtask 2.1 Lead topically driven cross-REL coordination activities.

Each REL shall be responsible for developing, coordinating, reporting, and promoting REL activities on one non-overlapping topic in education (“leadership area”) that has both regional and national importance. Work within this Subtask is intended to: (1) strengthen and leverage the knowledge and experience across the REL Program on a topic, (2) increase collaboration and coordination across all RELs, and (3) generate Task 4, Task 5, and Task 6 products that benefit the REL Program, REL partners and education stakeholders broadly.

After contract award, IES will identify one leadership area for each REL. After being assigned a leadership area topic, the REL shall lead the design and execution of activities like those described below. All cross-REL activities or products for a REL's leadership area shall be proposed to and approved by their COR.

RELs may be asked to present cross-REL activities or products from their leadership topic to program offices within the Department, including and beyond NCEE, at IES's office in Washington, DC up to two times over the course of this contract; such activities shall also be covered under this Subtask.

Cross-REL working group meetings

Cross-REL working group leads are responsible for scheduling and coordinating quarterly working group meetings to accomplish the goals of this Subtask. Discussion topics shall include but are not limited to discussing potential or ongoing joint cross-REL projects, understanding and documenting related work from each REL, and sharing REL or extant resources or approaches related to the topic area.

To develop shared knowledge across the program, working group leads may also plan cross-REL activities intended for REL-only audiences, including but not limited to staff participating in the working group. Examples include but are not limited to workshops on current evidence-based research presented by an expert in the field, conversations on dissemination and engagement strategies, or discussions about research methods common in applied research on the topic the REL is responsible for under this Subtask.

Working group meetings or REL-only activities can occur virtually or in person; however, in-person meetings or REL-only activities may only be proposed if they coincide with an event that REL staff are already attending.

All activities under this Subtask shall be outlined in the Bi-annual Assessment of Progress and reported on in the Monthly Progress Report.

Required external cross-REL activities or products

Within the first 18 months of the REL contract, each working group shall develop a brief, public-facing product such as a fact sheet or brief memo providing an overview of the topic that includes relevant REL and non-REL research and technical support products.

In either Year 2 or Year 3 of the REL contract, each working group shall develop a public-facing product or at least one activity that highlights and/or synthesizes the work that RELs are doing across the program around the given topic area. These can also include non-REL research.

Examples include, but are not limited to: a coordinated series of dissemination activities (e.g., a series of newsletters or infographics), a topical webinar series that highlights and/or synthesizes both REL and non-REL research, a cross-REL presentation at a conference, or a cross-REL event.

In either Year 4 or Year 5 of the REL contract, each working group shall create a public-facing product that highlights REL work in a given topical area. The product can also include peer-reviewed non-REL research relevant to the topical area. Once completed, each working group shall deliver, record, and archive a presentation on the product. Potential venues include national practitioner conferences, presentations at the Department, or other sites identified in consultation with the REL COR.

Optional external cross-REL activities or products

In addition, RELs may, but are not required to, jointly develop an original cross-REL activity or product. Unlike the synthesis activities mentioned above, these projects are new activities such as a joint research study, tool, or TCTS project. These activities or product ideas can be formulated under this Subtask but shall be proposed and developed under the associated Task.

Subtask 2.2 Participate in cross-REL coordination activities.

Each REL must designate at least one person to be an active participant in each of the cross-REL leadership groups they do not lead. Participants are expected to regularly attend cross-REL meetings, be able to speak on behalf of their REL about the work occurring under the topic area, if there is any, and support the development of cross-REL products and activities. The REL shall report a summary of these activities monthly as part of the Monthly Progress Report.

Subtask 2.3 Coordinate and collaborate with regional Comprehensive Centers, other Department technical assistance providers, and IES investments.

The REL shall identify opportunities for coordination, collaboration, and dissemination with other IES funded activities and other federal and local technical assistance providers. The REL shall not duplicate the information gathered or services provided by other federal or non-federal technical assistance providers. The REL shall refer stakeholders to other available resources when the stakeholders' needs are outside the scope of REL Program or when the needs can be more effectively met by others.

Regional Comprehensive Centers

In a joint effort with the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education's (OESE's) Comprehensive Center Program, the REL shall coordinate and collaborate with each of their regional Comprehensive Center counterpart(s) in their region in order to ensure the work of the REL contributes to the development and implementation of a cohesive and potentially deep body of knowledge nationally as well as in each region, avoids duplicating efforts across programs, and streamlines and simplifies the process of receiving federal technical support from the stakeholder perspective.

RELS and their regional Comprehensive Center counterpart(s) shall establish regular meetings, to occur at least quarterly across the entirety of the contract period, to ensure continuous coordination and potential collaboration. Discussions

in these meetings shall address topics such as any new needs that arise, any changes occurring within a state (e.g., new leadership or new policies), updates on ongoing or potential projects, and identifying any collaboration opportunities. These regular meetings can also cover planning for any collaborative projects—to be proposed under the associated REL task.

Within the first 90 days of the contract, the REL and each regional Comprehensive Center within the REL's region shall develop and sign a letter of intent that outlines how the programs will meet the coordination and collaboration requirements. This letter of intent shall be updated annually, as needed.

At least once per year, the REL and its regional Comprehensive Center counterpart(s) shall engage in a joint in-person (when possible) need-sensing activity with State Education Agency (SEA) chiefs or their designees (or similar level for Washington D.C, U.S. territories and Freely Associated States) with each jurisdiction they jointly serve. These in-person meetings will allow both programs to jointly understand the high leverage needs in the state, to determine how each program can potentially address the states' needs, and to more seamlessly coordinate any potential cross-program support. In March of Year 2 through Year 5, RELs shall develop an annual memo outlining the findings from the REL and Regional Comprehensive Center's previous year of needs-sensing activities by jurisdiction, and actions RELs and regional Comprehensive Centers are taking or plan to take to address identified needs.

All coordination and collaboration shall be outlined in the Bi-annual Assessment of Progress and reported on in the Monthly Progress Report.

Other Technical Assistance Providers and IES Investments

The REL shall establish formal or informal structures to maintain a clear, thorough, and up-to-date knowledge of the work occurring in the network of organizations that provide different forms of research assistance to stakeholders. This network shall include other IES investments such as the WWC, research projects funded by the National Center for Education Research (NCER) and the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER), National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) programs, such as the National Forum on Education Statistics, as well as other federal, local, and professional organizations that provide educational services to state, local education, and postsecondary agencies that align with the outcomes of REL partnerships.

Structures can include informal or formal meetings with other providers, IES contractors, or grantees in order to discuss any relevant needs-sensing, any research or activities occurring in each respective program, and any coordinated dissemination opportunities. At a minimum, internal structures shall be developed by the REL to allow the REL to identify research or other products and supports developed by all relevant networks. Strategies shall be developed for helping stakeholders make effective connections with these other services to avoid duplicative efforts.

All coordination and collaboration shall be outlined in the Bi-annual Assessment of Progress and reported in the Monthly Progress Report, which shall include a summary of the collaboration and referrals that have been made each month.

Task 2 Deliverables

Table 2 provides a list of required deliverables for work conducted under Task 2, as well as their due dates. RELs and IES may negotiate on a project-by-project basis to add deliverables as appropriate.

Table 2: Deliverables under Task 2

Subtask	Deliverables	Due Date
2.1	Lead cross-REL coordination activities	
	Cross-REL meeting agenda and materials	2 weeks before the meeting
	Cross-REL meeting summary	2 weeks after the meeting
	Proposal for Cross-REL, REL-only event	As needed
	Agenda and materials for cross-REL, REL-only event	3 weeks before event
	Summary of cross-REL, REL-only event	2 weeks after the event
2.1	Cross-REL infographic or newsletter	
	Proposal (infographic only)	As needed
	Infographic or newsletter	As proposed
2.1	Cross-REL webinar	
	Proposal	As needed
	Materials and agenda	3 weeks before the webinar
	Summary of Stakeholder Feedback Survey results	2 weeks after the webinar
	Event summary	2 weeks after the activity
	Event recording	2 weeks after the activity
2.1	Cross-REL video	
	Proposal	As needed
	Script and story board	As proposed
2.1	Video	As proposed
	Cross-REL conference presentation	
	Proposal	As needed
	Agenda and materials	3 weeks before the presentation
	Summary of conference presentation	2 weeks after the presentation
2.1	Summary of Stakeholder Feedback Survey results	2 weeks after the presentation
	Presentation to the Department	
	Agenda and materials	3 weeks before the presentation
	Summary of presentation to the Department	2 weeks after the presentation
2.3	Coordinate and collaborate with regional Comprehensive Centers, other Department technical assistance providers, and IES investments	
	Signed letter(s) of intent with each regional Comprehensive Center in REL region	Within 90 days of the effective date of the contract, updated as needed in contract years 2 – 5

	Joint needs sensing summary memo	Annual, no later than March 31st in contract years 2 – 5

Task 3: Working in Partnership with Stakeholders

A primary goal of the REL Program is to improve outcomes for learners through increasing the generation and use of research evidence in education practice and decision making. To achieve this goal, the REL shall develop and conduct all applied research, training, coaching, and technical support work in partnership with the stakeholders the work is intended to serve.

Subtask 3.1 Conduct needs-sensing and develop partnerships.

Throughout the duration of the contract, the REL shall engage in needs-sensing through communication with stakeholders in its region and secondary information sources such as state or district websites.

As described in the *Expectations for the Implementation of the REL Program* section, all REL work shall be planned and conducted in partnership and shall be informed by those partners' needs and desired outcomes. Additionally, RELs shall seek opportunities to engage students, parents, and community stakeholders from historically underserved groups when possible to identify and address issues related to educational equity. RELs may convene new partnerships or join established stakeholder groups. All materials developed for needs-sensing meetings with potential partners shall be submitted to the COR at least two weeks before each meeting.

For any partnering group for which more than one project across Task 4 and/or Task 5 is planned, or any group for which one Task 4 or Task 5 project is planned that will last six months or longer, the REL shall submit a partnership proposal alongside the concept paper²³ for the first project with this partnership. The partnership proposal will describe the overall focus of the work, the specific high-leverage need the work will address, an overview of how the need will be addressed through the REL's support, relevant context such as existing efforts outside the REL to address the need, and the individual members that will participate. Partnership proposals must include a letter of support from each organization that will participate to indicate that the approach is feasible and will

²³ A concept paper is a short (no more than five pages, single-spaced) document that serves as a high-level overview of proposed work. Concept papers must be approved by the COR before RELs invest the resources to develop a full proposal for a TCTS or applied research and development project. Concept papers typically include information on the high-leverage need to be addressed, scope of work, audience of the work, explanation of how the proposed work will support a partner's short-, medium-, and long-term targets, and a preliminary timeline and budget that can be updated in a full proposal.

meet their needs. RELs shall report on identified regional needs, including the source used to identify each need as part of their Monthly Progress Report.

Although partnership proposals are required under the conditions set forth in the previous paragraph, please note that once a REL establishes a partnership with a group of stakeholders, the partnership is not required to continue for the entirety of the five year contract cycle²⁴. Further, RELs are not required to propose a fully fleshed out set of projects when they begin work on an initial project with partners. IES expects that some partners will wish to begin work in partnership with a REL with a single, small-scope project. As such, RELs may submit partnership proposals once it is clear that the work done in partnership with a set of stakeholders will meet the criteria for a partnership proposal, even if work on a single project has already been approved to begin.

Once a partnership proposal is approved, the REL shall develop a partnership-level logic model (or equivalent) that outlines how the proposed activities done in partnership will lead to the attainment of the intended outcomes. Each logic model shall describe each of the applied research, training, coaching, and technical support projects the REL intends to undertake in partnership; the intended outputs; short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes of the work; and the intended, measurable, time-bound targets for each outcome. In order to assess the REL's progress toward the outcomes identified in the logic models and their associated targets, the REL shall also develop a measurement plan to determine progress toward and achievement of each target associated with a logic model outcome. IES expects that RELs will collect data related to measuring progress towards specific targets as often as is needed to determine whether they are being met, for example through Stakeholder Feedback Surveys (SFS) after dissemination or TCTS activities are completed (RELs may also use other data sources, including extant data or data the REL collects outside of the SFS).²⁵ IES expects the process of developing a partnership-level logic model and measurement plan with partners to be brief – measured in weeks, not months – in order to maximize the time stakeholders have available to complete the work.

Subtask 3.2 Maintain partnerships established under Subtask 3.1.

RELs shall continue to conduct ongoing needs-sensing with partners, convene meetings with partners that are not specific to a single ongoing project²⁶, and regularly communicate with the partners in order to progress the work toward the intended outcomes and associated targets under this Subtask. All materials

²⁴ RELs may propose a limited number of "one-off" projects provided they demonstrate that they are high-leverage. Additionally, RELs may propose sets of projects in a partnership proposal that will last longer than 6 months but not the entirety of the REL contract.

²⁵ IES requires that RELs administer a Stakeholder Feedback Survey (SFS) annually to partners, and to participants of Task 6 dissemination activities and Task 4 TCTS activities at the end of the activity. When possible, RELs shall also administer a follow-up SFS to participants of TCTS activities at least 6 months after the conclusion of the activity. The purpose of the SFS is to inform future projects and measure stakeholders progress towards their intended outcomes. IES will provide RELs with a menu of SFS questions to select from based on the specifics of that project; RELs will not be expected to develop their own SFS questions.

developed for meetings with partners under this Subtask shall be submitted to the COR at least two weeks before each meeting. RELs shall summarize these meetings through their regular bi-monthly or bi-weekly calls with CORs and through their Monthly Progress Report.

The logic models and associated measurement plans developed under Subtask 3.1 are to be considered living documents that change as conditions warrant. RELs should use these logic models as one tool to keep their current and future work focused on the outcomes, or to document new outcomes as necessary. The logic models and measurement plans shall be reviewed with partners, updated, and submitted to the COR biannually at a minimum through Bi-annual Progress Assessments. However, efforts towards maintaining or updating partnership- level logic models and measurement plans should be included under this Subtask.

The REL shall also administer a partnership- level SFS to all partners on an annual basis.

Subtask 3.3 Establish and maintain communities of practice (not required).

If a REL 1) is working in partnership with separate groups of partners within or across states that are focused on similar or related topics; and 2) determines that these groups would benefit from learning or working together, the REL may, but is in no way required to, propose one or more communities of practice (COP). The proposal should justify the size, scope, and high-leverage topic of the COP. The primary purpose of a COP should be to facilitate sharing of information, ideas, lessons learned, etc. among members through periodic meetings. While most of the REL's work should be developed and conducted to serve their partners' specific needs, some limited TCTS, applied research, or tool development work may also be conducted with multiple partners under the appropriate Task, facilitated through a COP. As with all proposed work, this will require the REL to demonstrate to IES that the work meets the criteria of "high-leverage."

Once a COP is established, RELs shall conduct ongoing needs-sensing, convene COP meetings, and regularly communicate with COP members in order to serve its members' needs. COP meetings should be summarized during the REL's regular check-in calls with their COR, and through their Monthly Progress Report. Once established, a COP need not be maintained throughout the duration of the contract period. Its focus may shift, or it may be discontinued if COP members determine that the COP is no longer needed.

Task 3 Deliverables

Table 3 provides a list of required deliverables for work conducted under Task 3, as well as their due dates. RELs and IES may negotiate to add deliverables as appropriate.

26 Meetings that are specific to a single project under Task 4 or Task 5 should be included in the budget for that project.

Table 3: Deliverables under Task 3

Subtask	Deliverables	Due Date
3.1	Conduct needs-sensing and develop partnerships	
	Partnership proposal	As needed
	Needs-sensing meeting materials	As needed; 2 weeks before meeting
Maintain partnerships developed under Subtask 3.1		
3.2	Partner planning meeting materials	As needed; 2 weeks before meeting
	Stakeholder Feedback Survey of partners	November 30 th of each contract year
3.3	Establish and maintain communities of practice (not required)	
	Community of practice proposal	As needed
	Community of practice meeting materials	As needed; 2 weeks before meeting

Task 4: Training, Coaching, and Technical Support (TCTS) for Evidence Use

The REL Program's training, coaching, and technical support (TCTS) projects and activities leverage RELs' unique expertise in designing and interpreting rigorous research, as well as the identification and application of evidence-based practices. Under this task, RELs shall identify, develop, and implement TCTS projects and activities that incorporate, build, and support partners' individual and organizational knowledge and capacities in service of addressing high leverage issues within the REL region. TCTS projects and activities shall be co-developed with partners, be more intensive than activities under other tasks such as Dissemination, and incorporate partners' specific contexts within their design. To the greatest degree possible, TCTS should be embedded within recipients' settings and their existing structures for determining and implementing policies or practices. Whenever feasible, RELs should also incorporate the perspectives and needs of student, parent, and community-based partners when developing and executing TCTS projects.

IES expects RELs to use TCTS projects to supplement and support projects under the *Applied Research and Peer Reviewed Research-based Development Projects Task* (Task 5) where appropriate. Blending supports across tasks maximizes the chances of the work achieving its short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes. For example, TCTS projects can occur before or during an applied research project to help partners understand existing evidence or collect more detailed, local data to support a research project on the high leverage topic of interest. TCTS projects may also occur after an applied research project is completed with the goal of exploring implications of the research and potential next steps towards meeting partners intended outcomes.

Subtask 4.1 TCTS Projects

Training

RELs are uniquely suited among the Department's technical support network to provide intensive *training* that increases the individual and organizational capacity of partners and/or stakeholders to effectively apply research evidence to practice and supports partners in identifying and fulfilling next steps to achieve their short-, medium- and long-term outcomes. Training activities involve hands-on, direct guidance or instruction from experts in research or practice. Examples of training activities include, but are not limited to, virtual trainings for administrators or teacher leaders on applying recommendations from a WWC Practice Guide or other rigorous extant research to professional development, in-person trainings for state-level staff on promising school turnaround practices, or training staff from partner organizations in the effective distillation and communication of research evidence on a specific high leverage topic.

Coaching

RELs are also uniquely suited to provide *coaching* that supports decisionmakers in applying research evidence to inform high-leverage decisions and actions. Coaching in this context is akin to being a “thought partner” or “critical friend” to individual partner organizations or a small group of individuals representing multiple partner organizations during the process of making decisions related to policy or practice. For example, coaching support can entail co-developing materials or other outputs with partners to encourage and support evidence-informed, partner- driven changes to policy or practice. Coaching supports partners’ decision-making through ongoing sessions covering research evidence or current practice related to a specific topic.

Technical Support

RELs’ expertise also makes them well-situated to provide *technical support* to build partners’ capacities to perform research-related activities such as identifying, collecting, analyzing and visualizing data. Examples might include, but are not limited to (1) providing support to a research office within a partner SEA or LEA to help that office identify existing data and/or collect new data necessary for an evaluation of an existing program, (2) providing support to a research office within a partner SEA or LEA to help that office perform data analyses on a topic, or (3) supporting a partner LEA or SEA in designing a study to inform or support its implementation or a local adaptation of a evidence-based practice or policy.²⁷

As with all REL activities, technical support should be targeted in service of partners achieving their desired outcomes in high-leverage areas. Technical support with the intent of general capacity building, absent a specific high-leverage outcome is not an efficient or appropriate use of REL funds.

²⁷ All applied research shall be performed under Task 5. However, RELs may work together with partners under this task to help develop code and/or co-analyze data for the sole purpose of building partner capacity to do such analyses independently. These types of technical support activities must be scaffolded. They may not consist of a REL analyzing data on its own and providing results to partners absent any capacity-building activities.

TCTS Proposals and Projects

As needed, the REL shall develop concept papers and proposals, and once approved, conduct TCTS activities.²⁸ TCTS activities may be proposed on a rolling basis throughout the contract, provided there is sufficient time to complete the work before the end of the contract period of performance. All concept papers and proposals will be reviewed and approved by the COR. Concept papers and proposals for TCTS activities shall identify partners by organization/office (if applicable), and the nature of their participation shall be described. When proposing a TCTS project, RELs shall describe how the activity or activities that comprise the project will help facilitate partners' desired short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes. Projects whose content and design is not anchored by partners' outcomes are unlikely to meet the criteria of high leverage. As part of a project's design, RELs shall collect or help partners identify and collect information necessary to determine whether the outcomes and associated targets for the project were met. All TCTS project proposals shall include a realistic and feasible timeline for completion within the contract period. TCTS proposals shall also include the proposed labor hours and costs for the project.

TCTS activities and related materials shall be informed by the highest quality, most rigorous available research. RELs shall emphasize the extent and quality of existing research on the topic of interest within all TCTS activities. When designing and proposing TCTS projects, IES expects RELs to think deeply about both the content and the design of their support. RELs should draw on research on effective professional development, capacity-building support, and adult learning theory as well as develop and assess new structures of support in order to meet their partner's needs. For example, research and literature points to the importance of stakeholders learning in the contexts in which they work (Elmore, 2004²⁹; Pfeffer and Sutton, 2000³⁰) and engaging stakeholders in activities that allow them to think critically about new knowledge (Yarbrough, 2018³¹). If a medium-term goal of the project is for recipients of TCTS to apply knowledge learned to their practice, RELs should seek to embed their support in TCTS recipients' actual setting or a similar context and provide critical thinking opportunities.

28 See Task 3 (Working in Partnership with Stakeholders) of the Scope of Work for a description of a concept paper. Concept papers must be approved by the COR before RELs invest the resources to develop a full proposal for a TCTS project.

29 Elmore, R. (2004). School reform from the inside out: policy, practice, and performance. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

30 Pfeffer, J. & Sutton, R. The Knowing-Doing Gap: How Smart Companies Turn Knowledge into Action. Boston, Mass: Harvard Business School Press.

31 Yarbrough, J. (2018). [Adapting Adult Learning Theory to Support Innovative, Advanced, Online Learning – WVMD Model](#). *Research in Higher Education Journal*, 35.

Quality Assurance for TCTS Activities and Projects

TCTS project teams shall include content experts who have made meaningful contributions in a field relevant to the TCTS activity, either through authoring published research or practitioner guidance. TCTS project design and materials should also be internally reviewed by experts in adult learning or professional development. In cases when RELs and their partners are conducting TCTS activities directly with educators, the RELs are encouraged to have at least one representative of the target audience co-develop or provide an internal review of the TCTS proposal and materials before submission to IES in order to maximize relevance, usability and actionability. This individual may be a current or former educator and may be REL staff. The REL shall also ensure that project teams include personnel with appropriate cultural understanding, content knowledge, and methodological expertise to conduct careful reviews of proposals and products before submission to the COR. In addition, the REL shall ensure that all products receive extensive editorial attention with an emphasis on plain language.

In addition to the internal quality assurance procedures listed above, the REL shall propose an external subject matter expert (SME) for every TCTS project with a short-term goal of increasing stakeholder capacity to understand the extant research literature on a high leverage topic. The sole role of the SME will be to advise the project team on the design and content of evidence based TCTS activities and products. The SME must be external to the project. That is, a SME cannot work on the project (or set of closely related projects) for which they act as a SME in any other capacity. The SME may be internal or external to the prime contractor so long as she or he meets the above criteria.

The REL may propose SMEs on a project-by-project basis, or submit a running list of proposed SMEs, along with their affiliations, backgrounds, areas of expertise, and a resume or CV for pre- approval by IES. Regardless, RELs must propose a SME and provide documentation of the SME's substantive expertise relevant to the project for approval before submitting a full proposal. The REL shall also submit a memo along with the first draft of proposals or relevant project materials outlining 1) the SME's feedback on internal drafts of proposals or materials; and 2) the REL's response to the SME's feedback.

Sharing TCTS materials

RELs are encouraged to submit TCTS materials for posting on the REL website, with the understanding that materials that are very specific to a partner and/or their context may not be actionable within other contexts, and thus may not add value to a wide audience if posted. RELs shall discuss with IES which TCTS materials they anticipate will add value in posting on the REL website; however, IES will ultimately decide which materials are posted. RELs are also encouraged to consider whether any TCTS materials they develop may be widely useful if slightly modified to be less specific to a partner's context. IES expects that RELs will adapt materials to a more general context and share through the REL's website in cases where such materials are likely to be widely useful and utilized.

Subtask 4.2 Implement an "Ask an Expert" Service

RELs shall develop and implement an “Ask an Expert” service to provide real-time methodological expertise and evidence-based thought partnering to key stakeholders within their region. “Ask an Expert” services should be limited to addressing questions that can be answered succinctly using evidence-based subject matter expertise, or expertise in designing and performing research studies. Requests related to interpretation or implementation of a policy or practice, requests where there is no directly relevant extant research to guide expert responses, requests for discussions with or presentations to a large (more than five) group of stakeholders, or requests that would require more than two meetings with the requestor to fulfill the request may not be addressed through this service and may be better fulfilled through a different REL task, or outside of the REL Program.

IES expects that “Ask an Expert” services will not be as intensive as TCTS under Subtask 4.1. Ask an Expert services are intended to provide quick turnaround support. This Subtask may only be used for requests from key stakeholders that can be addressed within one month of receiving the request. Additionally, RELs may not use the “Ask an Expert” service to produce products typically developed under Tasks 5 or 6.

Within eight weeks of the effective date of the contract, the REL shall submit a memo to IES that outlines how the “Ask an Expert” service will be implemented. This memo must be approved by IES in advance of the REL implementing the “Ask an Expert” service. This memo should outline several aspects of their “Ask an Expert” service, including:

- A systematic internal process for determining if a request is best addressed through the “Ask an Expert” service, another REL task, or another federal service provider. For example, a request for an annotated bibliography or research references related to an education question may be referred to the [ERIC Helpdesk](#) or [National Library of Education](#). If a REL does not possess the requisite expertise or resources to answer a request either through the “Ask an Expert” service or another REL activity or the request does not fall within the scope of the REL Program, they may instead refer the requestor to another federal service provider, or to experts external to the REL in lieu of answering the question.
- A process for “Ask an Expert” requests to be received and responded to on a rolling basis.
- A process for identifying an appropriate respondent to “Ask an Expert” requests and proposing respondents for IES approval. RELs may use SMEs in this role when their expertise is relevant to the request and/or propose experts to their COR on a rolling basis.
- A close-out process for “Ask an Expert” requests. This should include development of a short summary memo of each meeting with an “Ask an Expert” requestor, to be shared with both the requestor and IES within five working days of the meeting. This should also include a process to